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Creation of a Rose

and Short Poems



By

ETHEL McBAIN CLARKE

CREATION OF A ROSE
AND
SHORT POEMS



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CREATION OF A ROSE AND SHORT POEMS

CONFLICT.

HE, who, born with heritage of love and peace
Faces his life with equilibrium of strength for
mortal joy and woe;
Reaches his goal in life victorious, does well—
He adds a pillar to a nation's strength.
But he, who, born in atmosphere of strife,
Faces his life with songs of discord ringing in his ears,
Struggles and falls, and, writhing in his pain,
Reaches his goal—though half his life be done,
Does better—he has fought the greater fight,
And marks of conflict may be seen upon his brow.

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A LESSON FROM THE SONG.

“**T**HE Bird With a Broken Pinion”—

The choir sang the strain—
Over and over in childish years
I chanted its refrain.
Then I went away from the little church,
With its lessons of hopes and fears,
Into a world of greater things,
And paths of joy and tears.

A life of austere purity
I met as I passed along,
And I thought again of the lesson
Taught in that old, old song:
Yet I heard her mock at a fallen life
That was left to cringe and die,—
While she sang of the bird with a broken wing,
That would never soar so high.

Then I met with one who, erring, fell,
Yet rose to life e'en higher;
And the light that shone in her saddened eyes
Was not of mortal fire:
I saw her bend o'er a waif forlorn
Lost in the busy throng;
And grateful eyes gazed after her
As she hurriedly passed along.

I oft rejoice in the way of life
Where chastened fellows have trod,
That “The Bird With a Broken Pinion”
Came not from the lips of God:
For it seems his wisdom teaches
That those words by mortal pen
More fitting are to birds that soar
Than to souls of men.

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DEAR ONE, GONE.

THE rain comes softly down,
Softly down;
There is a mournful sadness in the sound;
For it fell thus on that day,
When they bore thee soft away.
Longer here thou mightst not stay,
Dear one, gone.

The wind sighs softly round,
Softly round.
There is a dreary heartache with the sound;
For it sighs above the tomb,
Where, beneath the shadowy gloom,
Thou wast laid but far too soon,
Dear one, gone.

The sun shines softly bright,
Softly bright.
There is a ray of comfort in the light;
For it brings me close to thee.
Once again thy face I see—
Beauteous now, from pain set free—
Dear one, gone.

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RECOMPENSE.

THERE is a recompense for those who die,
When Life is young, that robs death of its sting;
Their heritage is Youth immortalized;
Subtle its poignancy as grief is keen;
Forgotten are the dead—a little while
As Life sails merrily down pleasant streams,
But when its luster pales at eventide,
The wayward heart returns unto its dreams.

I think of two, long past the way of youth;
Together will they cross the final years;
No breach of faith has marred their wedded love,
Nor sorrow sought its sanctitude for tears;
And yet between these two there often steals
A shadow vision of the past, that seems
To cast its witching beauty over one,
In youthful charm—as from a world of dreams.

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SONG OF THE WINDS.

 H! the balmy winds of early spring,
That sob, and murmur, and laugh and sing;
That ever whisper in mirthful rhyme
Of the mating of birds in Southern clime;
They may turn the thoughts to the good and true,
But they leave a sense of yearning, too,
That robs my heart of its somber rest,
And I love the fierce North wind the best.

Oh! the summer wind that is soft and low,
Most gentle of all the winds that blow;
Which woos forth love with a charm, a kiss,
That enthralls some heart in its dream of bliss—
I have heard its pleading o'er and o'er,
But it does not charm as it did before;
No more it lulls my heart to rest,
And I love the fierce North wind the best.

Oh! the Autumn wind that softly sighs
Of the flower that lives, and droops and dies;
That recalls some long-forgotten face
Full of beauty, and love, and grace;
As the face recalls the past the while,
Old memories stir with faded smile;
Then the tears arise at Grief's behest,
And I love the fierce North wind the best.

The wind that comes with a shriek, a roar,
That sweeps each fluttering leaf before,
That mockingly sings, around, above,
And laughs at the falseness of human love;
While it fiercely blows, and fiercer yet
It fiercely whispers, forget—forget;
In its truculent call my heart finds rest,
And I love the fierce North wind the best.

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AS IN LIFE.

THREE players sat at a game of chance—
They were Flattery, Love and Truth;
They played a game which we call Fate—
Each game tied 'till the hour was late—
Each trick went down on Life's long slate,
And well each played, in sooth.


Love was a player fair to see,
And held winning cards to play;
But as the hours went on apace,
He glanced from Truth to Flattery's face;
Flattery smiled with errant grace,
While Truth had naught to say.

Then Love forgot that Truth was there,
And Flattery did the same;
Each chance to win they let slip by,
Each scorned to win and ceased to try,
Forgetting that stakes were sure and high,
And so Truth won the game.

Then Truth threw a scornful word at Love,
And Love saw Flattery's stare;
Love moaned, and his face grew white and set;
Flattery smiled as she smileth yet;
Truth had no smile, and no regret,
For she knew that the game was fair.

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ONE LIFE TO LIVE.

 ONE life to live, a soul to give, and a little time to pray;

But always the heart may start aright in remaining light of day;

So turn from the memory of wasted years, its page of Folly's trace;

And join the ranks of those who strive, and win for yourself a place.

There's always room to begin anew in the lines of those who toil,

And the spirit stayed by fellowship will rarely bend to foil;

Then perhaps the years which foolishly were cast to the wings of Time,

You may find a chance to recompense, when the record of trust is thine.

For it isn't so much the wrong you've done, as the right you will not do,

That will count in the last great reckoning, when the Master speaks with you;

And it isn't the years you give to Him, but the spirit with which you serve,

That will place you in line with those who win and best His praise deserve.

One life to live, a soul to give, and a little time to pray;

But always the heart may start aright in remaining light of day:

And he who gives his uttermost to each remaining year,

May read in the eyes of greater men that his past account is clear.

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HER EYES WERE BROWN.

WE wandered where the tide rolled in
And lightly beat the shore;
Her smile was blithe, her olive cheeks
Could ne'er have blushed the more—
The wind caught up her sunny curls,
And tossed them gaily round,
She lifted laughing eyes to mine—
—And oh! her eyes were brown

I stood there when a dainty yacht
Tossed on the restless tide,
And she was there—she sailed away
Another's winsome bride:
She said goodby, her hands outstretched.
My heart sank sadly down,
A sadness dimmed the laughing eyes,
—And oh, her eyes were brown.

I stood there when the yacht returned,
My heart had ceased to mourn;
A little one with shining curls
Across the deck was borne;
I caught the youngster in my arms,
Her soft curls fluttered round,
A blessing trembled on my lips—
—But oh! her eyes were brown.

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THE DREAMER.

I sat at the side of the schoolmaster's desk
And gazed on the pupils he taught;
And from all of the faces I singled out one
As the face of the dreamer I sought.
I was there when in one of her lessons she failed,
And she sobbed from the depth of her heart;
But bravely she took up her slate and erased
The wrong lesson from finish to start.

I saw her again in the schoolroom of Life,
And I knew she had failed in a test;
I saw the bright head bent low in its grief,
Yet I knew that my silence was best;
I saw her when bravely she took up Life's slate,
As before, in her lessons at school;
But she could not blot out the wrong lesson she wrote,
For the cross of its lines was too cruel.

I saw her again in the high noon of Life
When the quest of the dreamer was still;
And I knew she had won what is better than dreams,
By the strength of her courage and will.
Then I stretched forth my hand, and she gave me a smile
That wiped out the long distance of years:
But I knew that the triumph which shone on her brow,
She had bought at the price of her tears.

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KINDNESS.

I think that kindness is the greatest gift of any
gifts that be;
I wonder why 'tis not more often given;
It is not costlier to the poor than to the rich;
It need not favor most the learned mind—
'Tis ever free;
I wish that every gift from every friend
Would merely kindness be.

HITHERTO.

WHEN Youth's last echo calls to me,
And old age opes the door;
When I shall sit and muse and think
Of many things before;
One thing I crave the power to do,
Sincerely as I should,
—To look into the eyes of Youth,
And say that Life is good.

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CREATION OF A ROSE.

• **I** WAS accompanying a friend of mine through an old cemetery near a town in the Middle West, when he stopped before a grave marked by a wooden cross, and possibly by its appearance of isolation and neglect. My friend, whose religious views tend somewhat toward Universalism, indicated by a motion of his hand that he had reached a spot for which he had come in quest.

On glancing at the nameless grave my attention turned from the wooden cross to a shrub, bearing a white rose, which grew at the head of the grass-grown mound of earth. I saw at once that the rose must at one time have known rare cultivation; indeed, it then had every appearance of the most delicately cultured flower knowing only the touch of the skilled florist. I was about to express some such sentiment when my friend began to speak.

"I occasionally come to this spot, and at each recurring visit find that this shrub bears but one rose. Each rose seems more perfect than its predecessor, yet I believe the grave is never tended, and is visited, rarely only, by a few aged residents of the village who know the story of the old man who was laid here twenty-two years ago."

My friend seated himself at the foot of the grave, over which the long shadows of the day were already seeking their transient repose, and I followed his example.

"I planted the shrub," he continued, "when a boy of sixteen years. I did so at the request of the man whose grave is here, and whose death disclosed the story of a strange life."

Then at my request my friend related the following narrative:

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"I first knew him as an eccentric old man who passed the late years of his life in our midst, and in whom our village was furnished with one of those anomalous characters found in every rural locality, but in this case differing in one particular way from other characters,' inasmuch that none of the villagers could claim his acquaintance. He lived about one mile from the town center, in a cabin which I believe no inhabitant of the village, save myself, ever entered until after the old man's death. The cabin was not visible from the road and the cleared portion of his property was surrounded at the back and each side by a stretch of woods which he never cut away and in which no one trespassed. No passerby, however, failed to notice that the spot was inhabited by mortal being, for the entire front yard was filled with a patch of bloom that was the grudging pride of the village. His hyacinths, marigolds, verbenas and geraniums were the envy of the women, and the little children, who peered through the high picket fence surrounding his home, were not more wistful-eyed than the dewey pansies that bloomed in the old garden.

"There was one portion of the patch of bloom which was considerably elevated, having the appearance of being set apart from other portions, and in which the old gardener was known to spend the largest share of his working hours. This portion, visible from the road, was centered by a shrub which each season bore one white rose. The gardener seemed to take a special pride in the rose and it was rumored that at times he was seen kneeling before it in devout worship.

"He seldom gave away a flower. Instead he carried them to a neighboring village, receiving for them, I afterward learned, a small pittance. He usually journeyed to the town at night, returning at an early morning hour to resume his zeal for the creation of beauti-

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ful flowers. But, while his every move was mysterious, he was never molested by man, woman or child, a fact which I believe was due to the personality of the man which bespoke a timid and yet dignified reserve. I do not suppose that I would ever have made his acquaintance had it not been that my father and I at one time came upon the gardener lying prone in the road where he had fallen in some state of physical exhaustion. My father lifted him in his strong arms—at the same time bidding me pick up a basket of flowers which had fallen from the old man's hands—and carried him to the gate of the strangest abode in the village. Then by skillful measures my father restored the failing consciousness, and when the gardener had recovered sufficiently to be left alone we quietly departed.

“From that time the old villager always saluted us in passing and finally came to converse at times with my father who was quick to respond. We learned that he never attended church, a fact which, strangely enough, did not seem to horrify my father who was a man of stern religious beliefs. Instead he evinced an admiration and liking for the village character, and gradually a sort of conversational habit was established between them.

“At one time the gardener invited my father and me beyond the gate that stood as a barrier to the public's intrusion. He took us through his long rows of hyacinths, marigolds, verbenas and geraniums, and lastly he led us toward the garden spot where bloomed the white rose, detaining us when we would have advanced to gaze upon its beauty, yet inviting, almost fearfully, our criticism of the flower, which he said long years of study, patience and love had created. When my father stated in sincerity that it was the most perfect rose he had ever beheld the old gardener seemed moved and confessed that he had spent the greater part

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of his life in an effort to create a white rose, the purity of which would not be exceeded by the driven snow, and which would ever face the setting sun. I thought his remarks concerning the rose eccentric, and half expected my father to make some comment in accordance with my mental criticism, which, however, he did not do. After that I never saw the white rose, blooming apart in its singular beauty, but what I connected it in thought with the secret life of its earthly creator.

“On the death of my father the old gardener, though not outwardly expressing sympathy, made me understand that he missed the occasional visits in which the two had been wont to indulge, and one morning on visiting my father’s grave, I found a garland of flowers, bearing no name of its giver, but probably placed there in the quiet of the night by one who never by word or sign admitted any knowledge of the token of memory.

“After that I often stopped to watch the old man at his work and as often was invited into his garden. I think that in a measure the liking he had had for my father was transferred to me, for although he never asked me to repeat a visit, I believe he never found me in his way and, though merely a boy, I found a keen pleasure in watching him at his work. He had many flowers of hybrid species, which, in that rural locality was rare. I think he loved all his flowers for he often talked to them while about his work, but I liked best to watch his care of the white rose. He never invited me to come into the enclosed plot of ground where the rose grew but I was allowed to admire it from a short distance and he told me a little of its history. The shrub had developed from a wild sprig which he had found isolated on a distant highway. By some peculiar means of hybridizing he had brought about the creation of a rose, the beauty and purity of color in which I never saw equalled in any other flower, and which, as though

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yielding to the strange insistence of its mortal creator, always bloomed facing the west. In my growing acquaintance with the old gardener I came to form a certain religious sentiment concerning the rose; that is, I never saw it blooming in its white beauty but what I thought of the teachings of my father, and certain drowsy ambitions of my youth struggled toward maturity. I think the old gardener was conscious of my interest in the rose and I increased in his favor thereby. Once I grew bold enough to inquire why he had ever trained the rose to face the setting sun, and he replied, unguardedly, I believe: 'There are many for whom there will be no tomorrow, yet who walk toward the last sunset unafraid; such return to the dust from whence they sprung—but the rose—who shall say from whence it sprung and that its bloom shall not be immortal?' Words over which I marveled greatly as a boy.

"I was pleased when one day he invited me into his cabin which I found a small but cultured place of residence, although lacking somewhat in those things adequate to physical comfort. On entering I guessed at once the whyfore of his apparent inclination to spend much of his time alone, for the inner walls of the cabin were lined with volumes of good books, I say 'good,' for most of the books were the works of eminent authors, and the sacred scriptures occupied a prominent place on the rude shelving. There were other books with which I was not familiar at that time. An orphan, as I then was, and having been left to the care of guardians who allowed me to spend my time greatly as I pleased, I at once expressed to the old gardener my desire to spend my Sundays at his home in preference to attending church regularly, as was my wont, and I was surprised when he sternly rebuked me. This puzzled me for I knew he never attended church, and I had never

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heard him express an inclination toward any form of religion.

"Later, I occasionally visited his cabin, usually toward the close of day, for it was then that he rested an hour from his day's labor among his flowers, and it is as then that I best remember him. He used to draw up his arm chair to the west door of the cabin, and sit with eyes fixed on the setting sun, gazing half wistfully but calmly at its fading light until it sank below the distant horizon. After sundown I always took my way toward home, for he then began preparations for carrying a basket of his flowers to the neighboring town.

"So the years went on and one day came the news of the old villager's death. Passersby had seen him lying motionless against a little raised garden spot, and on entering had found that life was no more. I was among the last in the village to learn of his death and with the imparted knowledge I was informed that the man of eccentricities had left a letter, with a written request, directed to me, and to be carried out immediately following his death. The letter made known many facts of the life of the hermit and fanciful gardener.

"It developed that, by the tending of his patch of bloom and sale of his flowers he had accumulated a small fortune, which by a strange will he had left entirely to charity. His many books he had bequeathed to me in remuneration for the carrying out of a last request which he had made. It developed further, that born a sensitive and impressionable child, he had on the death of his parents in his infancy, been placed under the influence of an atheistic guardian and sole educator. That influence had accompanied him through life and he had found it impossible to break the bonds of its fastness. In a personal God he had never believed and in Nature he had found his only solution of the riddle of Life and Death. From all his beds of flowers the

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gardener had singled out one shrub, bearing a white rose of which he wrote thus to me:

“‘I have not the faith of the believer and I have been taught to think that my life goes out utterly at the end. I have one last request to make, namely, that this rose be planted at my head, facing the setting sun, as in life I have trained it to grow. I have dared to believe that it will live so long as the world shall last and that unshed tears from eyes that could not see light will prove sufficient nourishment for its growth. I desire that it shall be tended by no mortal hand, for it is not as other material things.’”

Here my friend paused in his narrative, and we both, with one instinct, glanced at the white rose. Then suddenly I exclaimed:

“But his request—that it face the setting sun—look, the rose faces the East!”

“Your words conclude the story,” my friend answered as we rose to go. “I carried out his last request, planting at the head of his grave the shrub, with the rose still in bloom. Contrary to expectation, it continued to bloom during the remainder of the season. But the next year there bloomed at the head of the grave a new rose that had turned to face the East.”

There was a long pause, then he added:

“It is a curious fancy, but I have often wished the old gardener knew that the rose is facing the sunrise—and I sometimes think he does.”



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